



Support The Office of Colonias and Farmworker Initiatives Establishment Act of 2023

Streamline and Coordinate Programs for Colonias and Farmworkers

Sponsor: *Rep. Henry Cuellar*

Co-Leads: *Rep. Jasmine Crockett & Rep. Veronica Escobar*

Background

The term “Colonias” refers to unincorporated communities within 150 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border that often lack basic amenities—including potable water, wastewater systems, and decent housing. There is no universal list of recognized colonias, but recent studies estimate 2,459 across Texas, California, Arizona, and New Mexico. Some colonias were started in the 19th century, others emerged within the past 50 years. Most began when land was sold without infrastructure and homes were gradually built—providing an affordable option for home and land ownership.

Endorsements

Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs, Chicanos Por La Causa, Enterprise Community Partners, Habitat for Humanity International, Housing Assistance Council, League of United Latin American Citizens, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Migrant Justice, National Association for Latino Community Asset Builders, National Education Association, National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association, National Rural Housing Coalition, Raza Development Fund, Rural Community Assistance Partnership, and United Migrant Opportunity Services.

Summary

The Act would create an Office of Colonias and Farmworker Initiatives within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to better focus on the needs of border colonias communities and farmworkers across the country. The USDA-wide office will coordinate and lead inter-departmental and inter-agency efforts to address the needs of these populations, including housing, health care, water and wastewater infrastructure, high-speed broadband, access to economic opportunities, and more.

The Office will act as a one-stop shop for colonias and farmworker issues and will ensure that relevant programs and policies are efficient, accessible, and developed in consultation with stakeholders and public and nonprofit organizations serving these communities. **This bill will streamline federal, state, and local government outreach and assistance for colonias communities and farmworkers.**

Specifically, the legislation directs the Office to:

- Improve engagement with border colonias communities and farmworkers and their families;
- Recommend new initiatives and programs to benefit these communities;
- Provide technical assistance; and
- Create an interagency federal coordinating committee to provide recommendations for assisting colonias and farmworkers and their families.

The Act builds on previous work dating back to the 1990s by Rep. Cuellar at the state and federal level to improve conditions in colonias—including passing landmark legislation in Texas and working with former Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison to increase funding for colonias. In addition, as a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Cuellar secured report language in the fiscal year 2022 omnibus appropriations bill calling for USDA to explore creating an Office of Colonias and Farmworker Initiatives.